SERVED BY THE SMALLEST
~~Matthew 23:1-12, 18:1~~-4
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JMB
BSPC
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Some gentle ribbing I received this week is a helpful lead into the topic. I brought a small sack of herb bread to the church office one day. ~~Last week~~. Now, herb bread may be purchased at a small specialty shop in Bexley. For 95¢ you can get a sack full of small pieces of crisp, toasted bread, heavily buttered, salted and given character by a wonderful combination of herbs and spices. It makes a marvelous snack for the car, although it is difficult not to get the crumbs all over the seat, but worth the effort. In any event, I was sharing the herb bread with some of the people who work here and one of them said, good-naturedly, "I suppose this is what you'll have us using next for communion."

or Irish Soda Bread

~~Well, maybe~~. I assured her that Polynesian Sweet Bread was as far as I go, but the more I thought about it the more I watned to say this morning that what we're trying to convey in some of these changes is that the sacrament of communion is appropriately a time of great joy and life, that among other meanings, it is a family reunion and there is a lot of laughter around the tables, and that it is appropriate, on occasion at least, to let that secret out by ~~eating some bread that is clearly bread~~.

adjusting the liturgy & the arrangements, even the elements so that the occasion feels more human, more identifiable The Committee that studied it & recommended the service, discussed - in its own deliberations that for children - communion is for more Savior & servior Brothers the

a joyful feast. In fact, the suggestion that it can be that is sometimes news to adults as well.

Presbyterian communion traditionally has been patterned after the last supper. "This is my body. This is my blood. Everytime you eat this bread and drink this wine, remember me," ~~he~~ Jesus said. And since he said that ~~on the night he was arrested,~~ at his last meal with his friends, on the evenign before his ~~execution~~ Crucifixion, we do remember all of that, profoundly, ~~pregnantly~~ poignantly, deeply. Traditionally, our observation of the sacrament has been careful, orderly, reverent, dignified. It will always be so.

However,

There is evidence, that the early Christians, when they gathered for their weekly meetings, and ate together, and remembered their Lord, did not remember only the last supper, betrayal, arrest, trial ~~and~~ crucifixion. Passion of Jesus: Of course they remembered that sequence. How could they forget it? But they also remembered breaking bread and drinking wine with him on many other occasions: in modest cottages in Galilee with good friends, and families, with children playing and lots of laughter: on the hillside when somehow a young boy's lunch became the basis for an unforgetable meal for thousands. They remembered the dramatic last supper, but they surely remembered the next meals: that supper in a road house in the town of Emmaus, on Easter

evening, when ~~ten~~ two of them invited a third traveler to eat with them - and their hearts burned within them, and when the man broke the bread for them ("their eyes were opened and they recognized him.") And surely they remembered as well that morning, on the beach, when his friends - exhausted from fishing all night - were summoned to the shore by a man who had started a fire, a man who cooked them breakfast and who, again in the communion of eating together, they recognized as the Risen Christ.

~~So,~~ The early church, when it gathered for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, remembered the night of his arrest and also the morning of his resurrection. And so the church, early in its history, when it gathered at table, remembered the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, even death. And as they ate the bread and drank the wine they were reminded of the goodness and bounty of a whole creation, redeemed by their Christ and so called the occasion Eucharist - Thanksgiving. And as they ate together, they were deeply aware of the relationship they enjoyed with one another: ~~and the literal life and death importance it had for them. and so they gave the occasion another name - the Communion.~~

in times of persecution and constant threat from the authorities the literal life & death implications of that relationship. And so the occasion took on another dimension — and they called it Communion. →

Remembrance
Thanksgiving
Communion

When we celebrate the Sacrament it can appropriately have any of those meanings, or all of them, or meanings deeply personal and nearly indescribable. It is not possible for me to commune without remembering the beloved people with whom I have broken bread and shared the cup and with whom I am very much in relationship still, even though some are gone. Today, I invite you to come to table, in that spirit, recalling our Lord's last supper, but also recalling his loving, sustaining, enlivening presence.

All are invited today: all ages. Families are invited to come to table together; and those of us who do not have family members here are invited to be a family with one another.

Customarily, children - before their confirmation and joining the church - were not included in Presbyterian communion. That has changed now. Baptism makes a person part of the church. What happens in adolescence is confirmation of that event and commissioning to adult service and discipleship. Communion is for the whole family of the church and it is now the responsibility of parents to decide when their children may participate. They are welcome to join us at the table whenever we celebrate communion. They are particularly welcome today.

BIG SPACE BEFORE Sermon Part

Matthew 18:1-4
23:1-12

served by the smallest

1.) Jesus turned the world upside down. The reason the religious experts of his day could not understand him is that he was not simply yet another rabbi, not a new twist. || Rather, in the fullest sense of the word, he was a religious revolutionary. || He took the established way of thinking about things and turned it upside down.

So when is that clear, and nowhere is Jesus more revolutionary than when he said:

~~There is no more radical or revolutionary passage than this: "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."~~

The one all who themselves all who themselves in Matthews account

The contrast between those words and the people to whom he said them could not be more sharply drawn. || For some time Jesus had been under interogation by the religious

authorities of his day, the Scribes and Pharisees. The format has been a question they ask - often a trick question - and his response, confounding them, avoiding the trap, and exposing their hypocricy. The tension is mounting, Matthew wants us to understand, and at chapter 23, Jesus takes the offensive. It's going to cost him his life. "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees" he says, seven times - each time exposing their hypocricy. The passage we are looking at this morning is the introduction to those woes.

We need to acknowledge, at this point, that there was much about the Scribes and Pharisees that was admirable, and that Jesus was not opposed to institutional religion. What he didn't like and exposed was their hypocrisy. And so we hear him describe sarcastically the way some Scribes and Pharisees use their religiosity in order to gain prestige. The small leather pouches containing words of sscripture which good Jews were to wear around forehead and on forearm - called Phyacteries, didn't need to be elaborate, with fancy fringe - unless their purpose was to attract attention. And the public recognition they received, the professional courtesies and clergy discounts and the seats of honor at banquets.

3

In contrast to the image of prestige & respectability & power typified by these religious authorities, Jesus used two striking images to illustrate what is important to God - ~~Childhood~~ the images of Child & Servant

~~In contrast,~~ Jesus frequently used children and ~~child-~~ likeness ~~as images to illustrate~~ what he meant "You must be like a child to enter God's kingdom," he said once. and ~~in the text for the day,~~ later he turned upside down the traditional way of thinking about things so that the attributes of childlikeness, innocence, weakness, wonder, humility, suddenly become the characteristics of God's people.

Jesus never said it was wrong to want to be great. He simply changed the definition of greatness - and forever became a radical critic of the world's inevitable conclusions on the topic. "Who is greatest among you will be your servant."

4. Think briefly about these two images as behavioral model for the Christian Life — The Child & The Servant. — The psychologists remind us that there are admirable childhood traits that we should be retaining - and recovering if we have lost them. In fact, Psych suggests that maturing + becoming adult in our culture often means losing that about us which is most admirable, most loving, most open to God ... innocence, wonder, openness, honesty, & capacity for intimacy + love + communion —

5 What happens to it? Why, in the Vocabulary of Transactional Analysis do we keep the child in us so hidden?

HUGH MISSILDINE, in a book many of you have read, Your Inner Child of the Past, suggests that part of the reason is deeply embedded in our culture. MISSILDINE - and others - feel that our culture does not value childhood nearly as much as it thinks it does... and it occurs to me

me that the twin horrors of the physical abuse of children in ~~this culture~~, and their use as objects of sexual stimulation and gratification in a very lucrative pornography market, ought to be forcing eveeryone of us to translate our discomfort and rage into some critical analysis of the way we think...I've never forgotten, for instance, a vignette I discovered reading some history once, that there were native American tribes whose phrase to identify the European settlers was..."those who strike their children." At least for those native Americans, it was an appalling concept, that children would be physically hurt by adults.

Missildine observes that "our culture requires constant moral judgment of children as "good" or 'bad" while other cultures ~~do not~~ accept their behavior as that of children. (p. 33). Dr. Missildine notes that "Millions of us grew up in a kind of moralizing attitude that is burdensome to children." and that "our traditional cultural view belittles childhood and everything about it." (33-34) back to P8

In God's kingdom, the gifts of childhood - wonder - innocence - spontaneity - are highly valued. In God's kingdom - greatness is defined by service, not vice versa.

Again - it is inverted way of thinking for us..

7. Creatures is strength, for us: power, influence, wealth. || Creatures may be defined - if we read the fine advertising in The New Yorker carefully - by the amount of service one is rendered. || In one of the most subtle ads - on TV. - greatness is defined by a car so fine, the owner drives the chauffeur...

The contrast is still dramatic. The symbols of greatness for us are powerful; service is what others provide for the great. One of the most eloquent and subtle articulation of what greatness is occurs in a BMW television commercial for those who can afford a car like that, a car so fine and sleek that the owner drives the chauffer himself.

There is a sense in which the teaching of Jesus will always be proceeding in a direction opposite from teh world on this issue. There is also a sense in which humility, when it becomes a behavioral goal, loses its greatness. The service he was talking about, therefore, results when a person has allowed Jesus Chrsit to convert - even one's value system - Service that is synonymous with greatness is unselfconscious. It is simply done.

Madeleine L'Engle wrote wisely: "The times I have been most fully me are when I have been wholly involved in someone or something else: when I am listening rather

than talking; cooking a special, festive dinner; struggling with a fugue at the piano; putting a baby to bed; writing." (The Summer of the Great-Grandmother, p. 53)

It is the freedom and unselfconsciousness and innocence of children. God's kingdom is here in that. God's kingdom is in us when we can wonder with the capacity for astonishment and joy and laughter which we once had. God's kingdom is present when, intellectually, we define the meaning of our lives, no longer in the terms of the service others render to us, but the service we are privileged to render others.

We participate in greatness, defined for us - not by Madeleine _____, but by Jesus the Christ, whom we serve.

So let us come to table - with children - served by the smallest. Let us come at the invitation of him who said - "the one who is greatest among you shall be your servant." Amen.